



New York District Office

# ***News Release***

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## ***Lights Brightened Again for Small Business after 9/11***

**New York, NY**— A farm boy from Wisconsin, Rob Halle never predicted he would have become a successful entrepreneur within the high-fashion photography industry of New York City. He also never would have anticipated overcoming the level of disaster that almost destroyed his business after 9/11.

After earning a master's degree in production management from the University of Wisconsin, Halle moved to Los Angeles in 1976 to put his knowledge into practice. For the next five years he worked for an international theatre, film and television equipment supply company. He then relocated to New York in 1981 to work for a lighting-industry manufacturer. After a year Halle decided he wanted to strike out on his own and in 1982 incorporated RGH Lighting, Inc. and opened a store in the West Village offering full-service lighting and equipment rentals. Over time, RGH became well-established within the fashion industry and thrived on cover shoots for magazines such as Vogue, Victoria's Secret and Revlon. RGH also developed a reputation throughout the tri-state area for its personalized attention and service to photographers, major studios, and production companies. By 2001, the company had grown to eighteen employees, but any anticipated future growth came to a screeching halt on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Halle recalls standing at the corner of Leroy and Greenwich Streets together with his employees watching the towers crumble. Putting thoughts of his business' survival aside, Halle volunteered his company's trucks around the clock for the next four weeks to deliver supplies, food, and rescue workers to ground zero. Unfortunately, while Halle was volunteering his company's assets in the relief effort, his business was collapsing around him. His major photo clients, models, and photographers feared working in the city and took their business out of town, and RGH's business plummeted by ninety percent. Bills continued to pile up and Halle was unable to pay his employees, rent and insurance.

Fortunately, Halle learned of the 9/11 disaster assistance offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration and applied for its Disaster Recovery Loan. He described sitting in the mid-town SBA office sharing stories and sorrows with other businessmen.

As he described it, “I sat in the waiting room with seven grown men and cried, sharing our personal loss and the loss of so many lives.” Just a week later, an SBA representative met with Halle and provided him with a check --- and a hug. Halle recalled, “Her eyes reached out to me with compassion and care.”

With the SBA’s quick turnaround on Halle’s loan application, RGH Lighting bounced back. In fact, the company did so well that in 2006 Halle relocated his operation to the photography district off West 54<sup>th</sup> Street. By 2007, Halle had sixteen full-time employees and six contractors. He purchased new trucks, equipment, a warehouse and studio space in Brooklyn.

This past February, RGH merged with Scheimflug, a digital-capture company, and their combined capabilities created a unique ~~WDMQUDMG~~ business by 20 percent. The new owner and president of the combined operations, John Engstrom, said the business is now poised for an exciting period of expansion and growth and anticipates revenues of several millions due to the merger. Halle transitioned to senior vice president of the company and concentrates on building the brand and providing high-quality service to clients in a rapidly changing industry.

Halle attributed part of RGH’s resurgence to the SBA. He said, “Without the loan, I would have shut my doors, dissolved my business and left the city broke and in debt. Instead, with the help of the SBA, I grew my company back to the point where it became not only successful, but an attractive merger opportunity for another company. I thank the SBA and feel nothing but great, genuine compassion.”

With its lights shining brightly again throughout the city, RGH’s resurgence is metaphor for the city’s resiliency post 9/11.

*—by DeAnn Misilmeri*

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